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August 2, 2006

Mark Rey, Under Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Rey:

I appreciated the opportunity to hear from you directly this morning in the Agriculture Committee regarding the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forest proposed forest plan. As I expressed in my letter of July 28th as well as this morning, I am concerned by what could be a sudden change in direction by the Forest Service and the delay in release of the draft GMUG Forest Plan.

This morning you cited two primary reasons for the delay. The first reason has to do with the coal inventory required by section 437 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPACT) that requires the Secretary to identify lands containing coal resources as well as restrictions on development of that resource and report those findings to Congress. The Forest Service must have known of this requirement, and yet apparently waited until now to pull the plan. I request that you provide me with a detailed explanation on how the proposed GMUG plan is affected by this EPACT provision. Please include information on any other provisions in the EPACT that the proposed GMUG plan failed to take into consideration.

The second reason you mentioned was the scope of the proposed plan and the inability for the USDA to move it forward under a categorical exclusion. Because this 15-year GMUG plan has been in the works for four years, I do not understand how the issue of the categorical exclusion was not discovered until now. Please provide me with a detailed explanation as to what management decisions in the proposed GMUG plan exceeded the categorical exclusion scope and how it relates to the 2005 planning rule.

Finally, I would ask that you keep me updated on the status of the proposed GMUG plan that is now expected to be released in mid-November.

In the meantime, I appreciate any and all efforts that the USFS is undertaking to keep the Colorado stakeholders updated on the proposed GMUG plan, the reasons for delay, the timeline for release, and the changes being made.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Ken Salazar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The "K" is large and loops around the "en". The "S" in "Salazar" is also large and loops around the "a".

Ken Salazar
United States Senator